



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

March 4, 2005

News Release

OPERATION PREDATOR ARRESTS SURPASS 5,000

ICE Houston arrested more than 200 child sex predators and foreign born sexual offenders

HOUSTON—More than 200 of the more than 5,000 child sexual offenders arrested by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as part of an ongoing international initiative known as “Operation Predator” have occurred in this area.

Operation Predator evolved out of ICE’s mission to find and deport illegal aliens—particularly those with criminal records, and reflects the agency’s traditional public safety mission. “Operation Predator was launched in July 2003.

Joseph R. Webber, special agent-in-charge of ICE’s Houston office said, “These are heinous crimes that rob our children of their innocence. We will use every available tool to stop these sexual predators from preying on our nation’s most-valued asset, our children, via the internet, or by other criminal activity.”

Charles Arendale, field office director for ICE Houston Detention and Removal Operations said, “Many of the sexual predators ICE arrests are foreign born nationals. As convicted felons and according to immigration law, they must be placed into removal proceedings. We will do everything within our power to protect our community from these perpetrators.”

Those arrested under Operation Predator fall into four categories:

Foreign National Child Predators: More than 85 percent of the arrests in Operation Predator involve foreign national sex offenders whose crimes make them removable from the United States. To date, more than 2,100 of these criminals have been deported. CASE EXAMPLE: In Houston, Fernando Sanchez, a Mexican national, was convicted March 4, 1995 of aggravated sexual assault of a minor. ICE deported Sanchez back to Mexico Feb. 15 after he had served his criminal sentence.

International Child Sex Tourists: Working cooperatively with foreign governments through ICE's attaché offices worldwide, ICE agents have made 14 arrests, including the first 12 arrests under the child sex tourism provisions of the PROTECT Act. CASE EXAMPLE: Michael Lewis Clark, 70, was sentenced in June 2004 to 97 months in jail for traveling to Cambodia and engaging in illegal sexual activity with two boys aged 10 and 13. Clark is suspected of molesting as many as 50 children.

Human Smuggling & Trafficking of Children: The criminal networks engaged in human smuggling and trafficking have become more violent and more profit-driven than ever before. At the same time, some of the victims are getting younger and younger. CASE EXAMPLE: On Oct. 10, 2003, Maricela Martinez-Uresti pleaded guilty to sex-trafficking charges. ICE agents in San Antonio, Texas, revealed that Uresti executed employment contracts with her co-conspirator, Violeta Juanita De Hoyos-Hernandez. They recruited minor females to work at restaurants. However, once in the U.S. the girls were forced to prostitute themselves to pay off their \$1,500 smuggling fees.

Internet Child Pornography: Drawing on ICE's cyber crime investigative expertise, ICE is tackling the crimes that cross the nation's virtual borders. One massive investigation has resulted in more than 1,200 arrests worldwide and marks the first time the government has gone after the financial side of child pornography. Moreover, through the national Child Victim Identification System, more than 1,600 pornographic images containing child pornography have been authenticated. CASE EXAMPLE: Ronald Gonzalez was indicted Feb. 3 for possessing and distributing child pornography. ICE agents discovered more than 1,700 images of child pornography and two child porn videos in his residence. Gonzales was also convicted of two felony crimes of violence in the state of Virginia.

Top ten states for those arrested:

California (1,351), Texas (465), New Jersey (380), New York (319), Illinois (213), Florida (196), Arizona (190), Minnesota (161), Maryland (107) and Michigan (128).

Additional information about Operation Predator is available on Web at www.ice.gov. ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. Investigators staff this hotline around the clock.

Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children should be reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, an Operation Predator, at 1-800-843-5678.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.